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## THE CHRISTIAN'S MANUAL OF ARMS, REV. 2—3.

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JESUS came to send a *sword* upon earth, and he foresaw that his disciples would have to struggle till the end of the age. In line with this thought is the fact that the last book of the New Testament is a book of war. The initial vision of Christ is war-like, as was that of the unnamed angel whom Daniel saw (Rev. 1: 12-20). Every promise in the seven letters is to him who *overcometh*. The first symbolic figure out of the sealed book is that of a conqueror (6: 1-2). All the redeemed have come out of great tribulation (7: 14). The judgments of the Apocalypse are set forth in military dress. Then there is war between Michael and the dragon (12: 7), and the dragon makes war with the seed of the woman (12: 17), which continues till Satan is bound (20: 2). The great beast makes war with the saints (13: 7), and there is also the war of the great day of God, to which the kings of the whole earth are gathered (16: 14). Babylon is drunken with the blood of saints (17: 6). The ten horns and the beast make war against the Lamb (17: 14), and the last assault of Satan is presented as a war (20: 8).

Since, then, the Apocalypse as a whole is a book of war, and since the seven messages of Christ to the churches have as one aim to show how each member may overcome in this conflict, we may call these messages the Christian's *Manual of Arms*.

The teaching of this manual groups itself under four heads: (1) Christ's "*I know*," (2) soldierly qualities; (3) the appeal to fear; and (4) the appeal to Christian ambition.

Let us glance at each of these heads.

Near the beginning of each of the seven letters stands the solemn "*I know*" of Christ. The Speaker, however, does not call himself Christ, but uses some more or less symbolical epithet

which gives a peculiar meaning to his declaration that he *knows* the circumstances of each church. The designation in the letter to Ephesus is general, and applies to all the churches (2:1). It is the one *who holds the seven stars in his right hand and who walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks*, in other words, the one who as Chief Shepherd has authority over the shepherds of the churches, and the one who personally inspects the condition of each church, who says *I know*.

In the letter to Smyrna, where the disciples are exposed to imprisonment and death, the Speaker characterizes himself as *the eternal one, who was dead and lived* (2:8). That fact makes his knowledge of the Smyrna church peculiarly comforting. Each member of the church can say: "He whose life has been proved to be indestructible knows my peril, and makes my life also indestructible."

In the letter to Pergamum, where the adversaries of Christ were strong and where there was gross sin within the church, the Speaker describes himself as the one who has *the sharp, two-edged sword* (2:12). This is suggestive both for those who are disobeying him, and in a different way for the faithful who are hard pressed by Satan. The sword that avenges delivers.

The Author speaks of himself in the letter to Thyatira as *the Son of God, whose eyes are like a flame of fire and whose feet are like burnished brass* (2:18). The Jezebelites in that church, who under cover of the Christian name live to the flesh, may well tremble at the thought of the knowledge of him whose eyes flame and whose feet crush.

In the letter to Sardis, where the church as a whole was dead though having a name to live, the Author describes himself as the one who has *the Seven Spirits of God* (3:1), elsewhere seen to be a symbol of the Holy Spirit (1:4). Let this church, then, which has a flourishing reputation, bear in mind that he who is writing to it has a knowledge of what is beneath the surface.

Christ speaks of himself in the letter to Philadelphia as *the consecrated and genuine one, who has royal authority* (3:7). In this city there were Jews who were being reached by the gospel (3:9), and this fact accounts for the titles which are used. He

who is *consecrated*, that is, set apart to the Messianic work (see John 10:36), and *genuine*, that is, the genuine Messiah, and not a false Messiah, as the Jews had said, he it is who knows the works of the Philadelphians. The door of opportunity which he has opened to them, they are to enter in the assurance that no one can shut it.

Finally, in the letter to Laodicea, where the church was in a deplorable state, the Speaker describes himself as *the Amen, the faithful witness*, and the active principle in creation (3:14). It is such an one who *knows* the Laodiceans and who writes sharp words of rebuke to them. These words will stand. Yet there is a thought of comfort associated with the Speaker's knowledge. He who was the agent in the creation of the universe might be the agent in the restoration of a fallen church.

Second, the *Manual of Arms* mentions various soldierly qualities. Thus the soldier of Jesus who will overcome must have *patience*, "the queen of the virtues" (2:2, 19; 3:10). He must be able to bear a heavy load without complaining, and to hold out resolutely in the good way.

Again, the soldier of Christ will be *morally impatient* with men who claim the Christian name but who are evil (2:2). He will be stirred with hot indignation toward would-be apostles and will put them to the test. This moral impatience with evil under a Christian garb is a soldierly quality with which Christ is pleased (2:6).

The *Manual* calls also for *faithfulness* (2:10), even that which goes to the length of laying down life if need be. Antipas of Pergamum illustrated this quality (2:13). It is equivalent to *holding Christ's name* (2:13), and springs out of a true faith, as service springs out of love (2:19). And *love* itself is another soldierly quality found in the Christian's *Manual of Arms* (2:4, 19). The love required is *the first love*, that is, an ardent and self-sacrificing love. This will work and minister. The soldier must see to it that this be not lost.

The *Manual* dwells still more on the importance of *chastity*. The two sins that had worked the greatest harm in the churches were eating sacrificial meat and committing fornication. This

leaven seems to have been at work in Ephesus, Pergamum, and Thyatira (2:14, 15, 20). It may well be that John, like Paul (see 1 Cor. 10:23-28), did not regard the eating of sacrificial meat as an act sinful in itself. The danger of it may have lain wholly in its association. In the Gentile temples of his day the grossest immorality was connected with the feasts to the gods. So the eating of sacrificial meat may have been prohibited because it was a first step toward unchastity. The abomination in which this sin was held by the Lord of the church is seen in the terms which he applies to it. It is the doctrine of Balaam, that is, purely heathenish (2:14). Its advocate in Thyatira is called Jezebel, the most odious female name in Israel's history (2:20). The *deep things* which she claimed to teach are really deep things of Satan (2:24). Against everyone guilty of this sin will come the sword of judgment from the mouth of the Lord (2:16). Another soldierly quality is *genuineness*. The Christian soldier must seek to have his works *fulfilled* before God (3:2). He must be alive in his sight even though he be regarded as dead by men. He must beware of the sin of Sardis, which professed godliness but denied the power thereof.

Finally, the Christian soldier must be *spiritually minded*. This quality, like the two preceding, is taught by warning against its opposite. The church at Laodicea was materialistic. The members said, each one, "I am rich, and what is more, I have gotten these riches myself, and I have need of nothing" (3:17). They live and move and have their being in the things of this world, which can be seen and handled and tasted. They have fallen from the love of the Father to the love of the world, and are entangled by the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the vain glory of life (1 John 2:15, 16). They have become nearly blind to spiritual realities, and do not appreciate that they are poor and blind and naked in spirit (3:17). The Christian name which they still bear represents all that Satan has left them of their heritage. The Lord declares that this sort of religion sickens him. It is tepid water which one involuntarily and violently spews out of the mouth. The Christian soldier, then, must be on his guard

against materialism, if he wishes to please Him who has called him into his service.

The third element in the *Manual of Arms* is the appeal to fear. Thus the Lord threatens to move the Ephesian candlestick out of its place unless the members of the church regain their first love (2:5). To be moved out of its place is to forfeit the Lord's fellowship and the privilege of shining for him. The condition of things in Pergamum required more vigorous language. The Lord calls for repentance, and adds: "Otherwise I come to thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth" (2:16). The sword of his mouth is his word of judgment, which overthrows and destroys (19:12). A similar warning is given to those in Thyatira who are guilty of the same sin (2:23). The formal Christians of Sardis are threatened in a way that leaves much to the imagination. The Lord says: "If thou dost not watch, I will come as a thief, and thou shalt by no means know in what hour I come against thee" (3:3). They are thus left in the condition of soldiers in an enemy's country, who are liable at any hour of day or night to sudden surprise and destruction. Finally, to the Laodiceans the warning is in the words: "I will spew thee out of my mouth" (2:16). The essential thought that underlies this figure is that Jesus will utterly cease to own these persons unless they repent.

The fourth and last element in the *Manual of Arms* is the appeal to Christian ambition. No one of the letters, not even that to Laodicea, is without its appeal to hope by the glories of the future. The last word is never one of threatening, but of promise. These promises of the seven letters are largely original in their symbolism, and are elaborated with evident delight. Together they constitute an appeal to Christian ambition that is without parallel in the promises of Scripture.

There are four dominant thoughts in these promises. First in order is that of *life*. Thus the victor shall eat of the tree of life, which is in God's paradise (2:7); he shall not be hurt of the second death (2:11); he shall eat of the hidden manna (2:17); his name shall not be blotted out of the book of life

(3:5); and he shall abide forever in the temple of God (3:12). No two of these promises are identical, though they all have the same general burden. *Eating of the tree of life*—the tree of the old Eden transplanted to the new paradise (Gen. 2:9; 3:22)—expresses participation in the life of the Messianic kingdom. Not to be hurt of the *second death*, *i. e.*, the suffering appointed to the wicked beyond the final judgment (20:14; 21:8), is only another way of saying that the victor shall share in eternal life. But the change in expression is significant. The language calls up that which the faithful disciple escapes, and this is of such tremendous importance that deliverance from it is ample reward for all the struggle of earth. The *hidden manna* suggests other associations than gather about the tree of life, but its essential thought is the same. It stands for the heavenly life, just as the historical manna meant physical life to the Israelites. It is still life that is promised to the victor, in the assurance that his name shall not be blotted out of the book of life which is kept in heaven, and also in the assurance that he shall abide perpetually in the temple of God. He shall abide in it as a pillar, *i. e.*, he shall continue there as long as the temple itself continues.

The second thought in the promises is that the victor will have *recognition* for all that he has passed through. Christ will give him a new name which no one knows but himself and his Lord (2:17). As this new name is a reward for the earthly struggle, it seems most natural to regard it as epitomizing that struggle. This view is confirmed by the statement that each victor's new name is *unknown* to all other men, for in reality no man knows the conflicts of any other soul than his own, and therefore cannot understand the new name which characterizes those conflicts.

A third element in the promises is *honor*. Thus to the victor in the church at Thyatira is promised authority over the nations. He shall shepherd them with an iron rod, as the vessels of a potter are broken in shivers. This authority will be such as Christ received from the Father (2:26, 27). The Lord here applies to his victorious disciple the same language that the Second Psalm applies to the Messianic King. The essential

thought of the promise is that the overcoming disciple shares in the high position of the Master who has overcome. That Master is king over all kings and lord over all lords, and his follower who has kept his word unto the end becomes a partaker of that honor.

In line with this is the promise that the victor shall be clothed in white (3:4), and that Christ will confess his name before the Father and the angels (3:5). Likewise it is a mark of honor for a disciple to have the name of God upon him and the name of God's city (3:12). It testifies that he belongs to God and has the freedom of the city of God. This idea of heavenly honor for the victor is perhaps expressed even more forcibly when Christ promises that the victor shall sit with him on his throne, as he, Christ, overcame and sat down with the Father on his throne (3:21). Thus the Messiah treats his triumphant follower as his brother. He could offer him no higher honor.

The last thought in the promises to the victor is that of a higher appreciation of Christ and completer fellowship with him. The Lord promises to his disciples his own *new* name (3:12; comp. 19:12). This new name of Christ, since name stands for character, seems to imply that there are riches in him which will not be appreciated by the disciple while on earth. If this interpretation be correct, it is plain that the victor is to have a completer fellowship with the Lord as a reward for his earthly struggle. This truth is also involved in the promise of the Morning Star (2:28), for the Morning Star is a symbol of Christ (22:16). But since the Christian possesses Christ even now, by whose aid alone he wins his victory, and since the reward will naturally be something that he does not already possess, we are constrained to hold that the promise of the Morning Star implies a completer possession of Christ than has been realized on earth. Such, then, is the great appeal to the Christian soldier's ambition. It is given to the faithful disciple, and, preceded by more or less severe rebuke, is also given to the unfaithful disciple. It is the last note to fall upon the ear in the case of the first three letters, and in the last four it is



followed only by the injunction to hear what the Spirit says to the churches, an injunction which refers to the promise no less than to the remainder of each letter. And so this sevenfold promise, which must well-nigh exhaust the vocabulary of glory, forms the closing part of the Christian's *Manual of Arms*. But ever just before the promise, as the way leading to its realization, stand the words  $\tau\hat{\omega}\ \nuικ\hat{\omega}\nu\tau\iota$ , "to him who overcomes," and this overcoming covers the entire campaign of the individual life.